
Local Government Committee

SSB 5326

Brief Description: Providing home rule charter cities the ability to choose their election system.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Kohl-Welles, Pridemore, Esser, Kline, Weinstein, Poulsen, Finkbeiner, McAuliffe, Keiser and Spanel).

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Substitute Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides first class cities with the option of using a "ranked voting system" (also known as "instant runoff voting"), thereby eliminating the need for a primary election.
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Hearing Date: 3/24/05

Staff: Kathryn Leathers (786-7114).

Background:

A "primary" means a statutory procedure for nominating candidates to public office at the polls. The Secretary of State, as Chief Election Officer, has general rulemaking authority regarding state and local elections. The Secretary and the state Election Administration and Certification Board have joint powers and duties related to rulemaking for the general administration of elections.

In most nonpartisan primaries, the top two candidates continue on to the general election and the candidate with the most votes wins.

Another system of voting called "ranked voting system" or "instant runoff voting" means a system of voting in which voters may rank candidates for the same office in order of preference, allowing voters to indicate a "first choice," "second choice," "third choice," etc. In general, the votes are counted as follows:

- First stage: All votes are counted. If a candidate receives a majority of votes, then he or she is elected. If no candidate receives a majority, the last place candidate is eliminated.
- Second stage: The votes on ballots for which the first choice was not eliminated (the last place candidate) are counted. The second choice is now counted for those ballots on which the first choice was eliminated. If a candidate receives a majority of votes, then he or she is elected. If no candidate receives a majority, the last place candidate is eliminated and this (second stage) process is repeated until all but one candidate has been eliminated.
- If at any stage in the counting there are two or more last place candidates, these candidates are eliminated simultaneously.

- Once a candidate has been eliminated, no votes may be counted for this candidate, regardless of how many second, third, etc., ranked choices might otherwise have become votes for the eliminated candidate in a later stage.
- Once a ballot is exhausted, it is disregarded and no longer counted.

To date, a ranked or instant runoff system of voting has not been certified by the Secretary of State.

Summary of Bill:

This bill provides first class cities with the option of using a "ranked voting system" (or "instant runoff voting") if it is provided for in the city's charter. If used, the ranked voting system will eliminate the need for a primary election. If a first class city provides for a ranked voting system, the Secretary of State must assist the county auditor with implementation of the ranked voting system.

A "first class city" is a city with a population of 10,000 or more at the time of organization or reorganization that chooses its local form of government (mayor-council or council-manager) through adoption of a charter. There are ten first class cities in Washington: Aberdeen, Bellingham, Bremerton, Everett, Seattle, Spokane, Richland, Tacoma, Vancouver, and Yakima.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.